

Birth Care & Family Health Services

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BABY CARE BASICS

CRIB SAFETY TIPS:

- Make sure your crib has no corner posts: older infants can catch clothing on these. Check that the crib slats are no more than 2 3/8 inches apart. Never put a baby in a crib that has missing slats.
- The mattress should be firm and fit tightly within the crib rails, with no more than 1-inch spaces (two fingers-width) between the rails and the mattress. Crib bumpers are not recommended as they can cause a suffocation hazard.
- Check the locks and latches on the crib. They should be smooth, and tight enough to prevent accidental release.
- Be certain the paint used on the crib is lead-free. Some babies do chew on their cribs, and ingesting lead can cause brain damage.
- Keep crib rails up at all times when baby is unattended.
- As soon as your baby can pull himself up, move the mattress to the lowest position. There should be at least 22 inches between the mattress and the top of the rail. If you plan to use a bassinet or cradle instead of a crib, many of these same safety tips will still apply.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS IN A NEWBORN:

Many parents doubt whether they will recognize if the baby is sick. When you have no experience with babies, being told that a sick baby behaves differently from a well baby is of little comfort. If everything about your baby seems unfamiliar, it is hard to have confidence that you can and will recognize changes that indicate your baby is ill. Besides, healthy babies can cry for a couple of hours each day. Crying does not tell you as much in the first weeks as it will when your baby is older. So how will you know if your baby is sick?

Asking yourself these questions may help:

- Is there a change in the baby's behavior? Is the baby crying more than usual? Has the tone of the cry changed? Is the baby sleeping more or less than usual? Does the baby seem lethargic or listless?
- Has the baby's appetite or digestion changed? Is the baby eating less than usual? Has the baby vomited more than once? If the baby is vomiting, is the vomiting forceful ("*projectile vomiting*"). Are there signs of constipation? Are there signs of diarrhea? Is the baby urinating less frequently than usual? Has the color of the urine changed?
- Has there been a change in the baby's breathing? Does the baby seem to have trouble breathing? Does the baby sound congested? Does the baby have a runny or stuffy nose? Is the baby coughing?
- How does the baby look? Is the baby's skin pale or flushed? Is there a rash anywhere on the baby's body? Do the baby's eyes look glassy or dull? Is there any discharge from the eyes?
- Does the baby have a fever, or too low of a temperature? Taken under the arm the temperature should be between 97 and 99 degrees.

If you are concerned, please call your midwives or pediatric care provider!

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NAIL CARE

Your baby's tiny fingernails are very thin and sharp and grow surprisingly fast! You may need to trim them as often as twice a week. This is important since newborns can scratch their faces with their own nails. Use a soft emery board or baby nail clippers for trimming. You may find it easier to do this job when your baby is asleep. To avoid snipping the fingertip skin as you trim the nail, hold her finger firmly and press the finger pad away from the nail as you cut. Don't panic if you draw a bit of blood (this is bound to happen at least once, despite your best efforts). Just apply a little pressure. Toenails grow much more slowly and are usually very soft. They don't need to be kept as short as fingernails — a trim once or twice a month is enough. Although they may appear to be ingrown, babies seldom suffer from ingrown toenails. Call your baby's health care provider if the skin around the toenails gets red, inflamed, or hard.

DRESSING

Dress your baby in one more layer of clothing than you are wearing yourself to keep him warm and comfortable. When the temperature rises above 75 degrees F, you can reduce this to a single layer. Touch your baby's skin often to detect signs of discomfort: If her hands and feet feel cold, add a layer; if her skin gets hot and sweaty, remove one. Your baby's skin may be sensitive to chemicals in new clothing and to soap and detergent left on clothes after laundering. To avoid problems:

Wash all new clothes and linens before your baby uses them.

For the first few months, wash your infants clothes separately from other laundry. Use a gentle detergent and thorough rinse cycle.

SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME

Experts agree that young infants are more at risk of SIDS if they:

Are put to sleep on their stomachs

Are placed on any soft surface: mattress, bedding, recliner, couch or easy chair

Are overdressed or sleep in an overheated room

Are a sibling of a baby who died of SIDS

Were born prematurely or with a low birth weight

Are exposed to secondhand smoke

Were born to a mother who smoked or abused drugs or alcohol during pregnancy

Were born to a mother who had no or late prenatal care

Were born to a teenage mother

Remember, it is always safest for babies to sleep on their backs. But don't forget Tummy Time, too!

Encourage your baby to spend time on her tummy when she is awake to strengthen her arms and shoulder muscles, as well as prevent her head from flattening. Put her on the floor on a blanket, or in a playpen with toys that spark her interest. She'll love to do her push-ups if you or a toy are in front of her to capture her interest.

WHEN TO BATHE

How often you need to bathe your baby depends a lot on how old the baby is. For a newborn, two or three times a week is probably enough as long as you keep her diaper area well-cleaned and wash her hands and face several times a day. Unless they've spit up or soiled themselves, newborns just don't get that dirty. The older your baby is, the more regular bathing she will need, particularly after she's started crawling and eating her first foods. By the time your baby's a toddler, you'll need to give her a bath almost every night- if not to wash off a busy day's worth of grime, then at least to help calm her down before bedtime. When's

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the best time to give a bath? In general, it's better to bathe your newborn before mealtime, if she's not too hungry. Too soon after eating and she might spit up. For older babies, a bath before bedtime works best, since it cleans them up for the night and helps soothe them. You might want to develop this evening routine: a bath, reading a story, then bedtime. But use your best judgement and give your baby a bath anytime she needs one.

HAIR CARE

Not every baby is blessed with a full head of hair at birth, but if your baby was, wash it with a gentle no-tears baby shampoo as needed. Simply apply a dab of shampoo to her hair, gently massage it in, and let it sit for a short while before rinsing it out. Wash your baby's hair last so she doesn't have to sit in soapy water. Finally, don't be surprised if your baby cries during her first few baths. She's just reacting to an unfamiliar sensation. Keep the room temperature warm and the bath water comfortable and soothe her by caressing and singing to her. She'll soon learn to love bath time.

The single most IMPORTANT thing to remember when giving you baby a bath is to **never leave her alone**. Not even for a few seconds. Babies can drown in as little as 1 inch of water- and in the time it takes you to answer the doorbell or phone. **Don't take the chance**. If you must attend to something while bathing your baby, always wrap her up and take her with you.

BABY SKIN CARE

While your baby's skin is famously soft and smooth, it is also strong and resilient. The skin is the body's largest organ- a group of cells stacked together to form a thin but tough barrier. Skin constantly renews itself throughout life, a process that begins even before birth. Still, many newborn's skin is anything but perfect at first. Don't be alarmed by considerable peeling, redness, or flaking in the first few days after birth. Areas like the wrists, knees, and feet may even bleed as they adjust to being exposed to air. This is all normal. Use a gentle skin ointment to help lubricate and heal cracked or bleeding skin. Your baby's skin will fill out and get smoother very soon.

CORD CARE:

When you change your baby's diaper, look at the cord stump. If it has been soiled, wipe it gently but thoroughly with rubbing alcohol to clean any debris. You only need to use alcohol on the cord when it becomes dirty. It is no longer recommended to do so every diaper change, as this has been found to slow the drying of the cord. Don't worry about hurting your baby- there are no nerve endings in the cord stump.

Be sure to allow air to reach the cord stump. This will help it heal and dry faster.

Try to prevent diapers from rubbing against the stump: fold the diaper down under the cord stump. Or you can use disposable diapers with a cut-out notch at the top.

Let the cord stump fall off on its own. This usually occurs around 2 weeks after birth, but can vary widely from baby to baby. Remember that babies are born with "innies" or "outies". Don't try to cover the umbilical area with bandages or wraps to change what your baby was born with - it won't work and will only cause problems.

UMBILICAL CORD WARNING SIGNS:

- If the cord oozes yellow pus, if it develops a bad odor, or if the area around the base is red and swollen, it may be infected. You should notify your midwife or pediatrician immediately.
- Redness can also be caused by the dry cord stump irritating the nearby skin. To determine what is causing the irritation, gently push the stump away from the red area and mark the margin of redness

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with a pen. Wait 30 - 60 minutes and check it again. If the redness is still there, and especially if it has spread beyond your mark, call your health care provider. If the redness is just irritation from the stump, it will take care of itself in a little while.

- Occasionally, you may see small amounts of bleeding from the navel - this is normal as the blood vessels separate. If you notice bleeding, first try applying a little pressure. If the bleeding doesn't stop after five to seven minutes of constant pressure, call your health care provider.
- After the cord falls off, your baby's belly button may swell a bit and continue to ooze slightly. This is called an umbilical granuloma. Your health care provider may treat it with a drying medication called silver nitrate.

BATHING TECHNIQUES

While your newborn still has her umbilical cord, it's best to give her quick sponge baths rather than submerging the cord stump. Once the cord has fallen off, feel free to bath her in a baby tub or sink.

- Lay your baby on a soft, flat surface (a clean towel works well). Have a basin of warm water and sponge or washcloth handy.
- Keeping your baby warmly wrapped, expose one limb at a time and gently wash it.
- Pat the area dry and start on the next limb.
- If you accidentally get the cord stump wet, simply use the towel to gently pat it dry.